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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2316
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0415
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0866
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1671
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 000079

SIPDIS

FOR EAP/MTS AND PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2014
TAGS: [PREF PHUM PREL SMIG BM ID TH MY](#)
SUBJECT: MALAYSIA: ROHINGYA SITUATION STATUS QUO

Classified By: Political Counselor Mark D. Clark for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The UNHCR has not detected any change in the status quo or increase in the number of Rohingya refugees entering Malaysia so far this year. A Foreign Ministry official said Malaysia would have "no problem" in joining a contact group with Thailand on the Rohingya situation, but gave no indication the GOM would take an active role in addressing the Rohingya situation. GOM plans to issue temporary stay permits to the Rohingya remain stalled. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Post has remained in frequent contact with UNHCR and informed NGOs regarding the situation of Burmese Rohingya refugees and trends possibly affecting Malaysia. On February 6, Poloff discussed the current situation of Rohingya refugees with Henrik Nordentoft, the UNHCR Deputy Representative in Malaysia. Nordentoft told us the UNHCR has not/not detected any change in the influx of Rohingya refugees into Malaysia or change in the status quo. He said the primary route used by the Rohingya is to travel by boat to Thailand and then cross overland into Malaysia. UNHCR's most recent report of arrivals involved 53 Rohingya who reached Thailand via boat on December 8, 2008. The group reportedly entered Malaysia, in Penang state, on January 8. The UNHCR has noticed that Rohingya activist groups have realized the political value of calling themselves "Boat People" and are trying to describe a wider swath of Rohingya under that banner in the hopes of increasing international attention. UNHCR/Malaysia continues to monitor the situation in Thailand and Indonesia and how this might affect Malaysia.

¶3. (C) Poloff spoke on February 6 with R. Selvaraj Ramasamy, Principal Assistant Secretary in the Multilateral Division within the Foreign Ministry, regarding Malaysia's position regarding the Rohingya. Selvaraj reiterated that Malaysia does not recognize refugee status. He said the Thai government proposed using a contact group to discuss two main issues, the Rohingya and the trafficking of persons along the Thai-Malaysian border. Selvaraj stated the GOM has "no problem" being members of such a contact group. He noted Malaysia sees ASEAN and separate bilateral talks between Malaysia and involved regional countries as possible approaches for discussing the Rohingya and other Burmese migrant issues. He acknowledged that the GOM was watching the current situation of Rohingya boat people, but said, "The 1000 Rohingya (boat people) is not Malaysia's problem, it is Thailand's."

¶4. (C) Selvaraj blamed the Burmese government for the outflow. He informed us GOM representatives met recently with Burmese officials regarding the possibility of Rohingya

in Malaysia being able to return to Burma. Burmese officials replied that the Rohingya are not Burmese and instead described them as Bangladeshi. Poloff asked about Malaysia's 2006 pledge to issue IMM-13 cards (similar to USG's Temporary Protective Status program) to Rohingya already in Malaysia and registered with the UNHCR, currently about 14,225 persons. He said issuing IMM-13 cards was "in the pipeline," but there was "no political will" to authorize issuing the cards. Selvaraj said if the Rohingya were issued IMM-13 cards, the Malaysian government would allow Rohingya children to attend schools and initiate training programs so "the men can work on plantations and Rohingya women can work as maids."

15. (U) A team from PRM, including the regional refugee coordinator, will be in Kuala Lumpur February 9-11. The team and Embassy officers are scheduled to meet Selvaraj and UNHCR officials during the trip and will gain more information related to the Rohingya.
KEITH